

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

## A Weekly Journal

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### KESTELL OF GREYSTONE.

A SERIAL STORY.

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"*A Faire Damsell*," etc., etc.

#### CHAPTER XV. JESSE'S BENEFACTOR.

"DEAR VICARY,—I have had a talk with Mr. Kestell about the offer we made you. I am afraid he does not look very favourably upon it; but you will, of course, come and talk to him about it. I shall, in all probability, be coming to stay at Rushbrook House next Saturday, so we can discuss it again; and I hope I shall then get your final answer. We can quite well wait till then. I am off the first thing to-morrow, so Miss Heaton has promised to let you have this some time in the morning. Yours truly, HOEL FENNER."

Jesse Vicary was lying out upon the moors reading this note which a lad from the Rectory had given him, glad not to have to walk the extra mile on to the farm, but to spend the time in pastime of his own choosing.

Jesse had been very busy thinking of the future as he lay there, and the note had not made thinking less necessary; and yet, in spite of it, he was conscious of intense happiness because of the warmth and of the beauty of his beloved moors.

Who would not have felt happy in this spot? Noonday had come upon the great moor with its yellow paths and its delicious scented heather and gorse? Jesse could have accurately told you the time, and so, for the matter of that, could any person of average intellect, for the grazing cattle hardly threw a shadow upon the green grass in the upland meadows, whilst everything was bathed in a faint haze of heat.

All at once the perfect peace was broken by the jarring scream of a pheasant in a neighbouring copse, and a few cocks crew from one of the squatter cottages on the moor; but these sounds almost seemed to enhance the eloquent silence of Nature. Jesse's eyes, which had been fixed on the distance, slowly travelled nearer home. Just in front of him rose a clump of withered black gorse stalks, and near to it was a solitary stunted bracken, whose yellow fronds slightly quivered when the light wind swept slowly round the hill-side.

"There are solitary beings in nature," mused Jesse. He was in a very contemplative mood; a mood which is the perfection of laziness of body and activity of thought. "That withered bracken-stalk, how did it get here, and that dead gorse? They look as if they meant to protest against the abundant perkiness of their fellow-creatures. I suppose there is a certain pleasure in protesting, but one is apt to get conceited over it. When Mr. Fenner suggested my leaving my present quarters, I expect I felt as that bracken feels, or ought to feel. Mr. Fenner has been very kind; I thought he could not quite so easily win over Mr. Kestell. I suppose it is hard to give up one's own way or one's own prejudices. He would prefer my staying where I am; but why? I do not ask him for anything. No, there are times when a man's gratitude may interfere with the higher powers God gives him to cultivate. I owe him much, but not that. I will accept this opening. Symee must have a home, and she shall. If I might go out into the big world, to Australia, or somewhere, where men make money, I know I could succeed; but then Symee would have no home; and yet I—I might grow rich, and come back with

something to offer to a woman. But no—all these are visions; but, anyhow, this offer is fact, and Mr. Kestell cannot prevent my accepting it."

Then Jesse fell into a deeper dream. This time it was wordless; the vision that floated before him shaped itself into a good and beautiful woman; and though Dante could give words to his passionate homage, there have been many who, though dumb and tongue-tied, have yet rendered the same worship at a woman's pure shrine.

He did not now worry himself about this happy time of idleness. He knew it was good for him, and that he would be able to work with more courage from being able now to drink to the full the cup of nectar which Nature presents to those who will stop and slake their thirst. As he lay there, his fingers touched even the withered bents of grass with reverence, and his eyes, wandering slowly from foot to summit of those very tall fir-trees in the near foreground, noted a hundred particulars which true lovers only see.

Hoel Fenner, with all his literary polish, his exquisite taste, his keen sense of fitness, might have sat here and seen nothing of Nature's true beauty, and would have derived no other piece of wisdom from what he saw further than to assure the next person he spoke to that Rushbrook was a very pretty neighbourhood.

But Nature, who can do so much for her worshippers, has also a limited power. She insists on having an unruffled surface to mirror herself on when she herself is unruffled, and expects passion in other hearts when she herself is rocked by tempests. Do not expect her sympathy, for between her and human hearts there is a great gulf fixed.

Jesse found out this to-day, for he knew he must at last bestir himself. Nature would do no more for him than give him hope. He knew that he must have an interview with Mr. Kestell, and that Symee would be looking out for him; so he started up, stretched himself with blissful contentment, and then went down the moor towards Saint John's Church, on his way to Rushbrook House.

Here he suddenly encountered George Guthrie, who could often be found apparently wandering with no object; but those who saw this did not understand George Guthrie. He made a dart at Vicary, and greeted him warmly.

"Just the man I wanted to see. How are you? Enjoying all this sunshine. I've

escaped from my cousin, because she has a meeting of good ladies to-day, and when they entered the hall some of them looked at me as if I were the old gentleman himself. I asked what the meeting was about, and my cousin looked upwards and showed the whites of her eyes and said, 'T. A. P. S.' 'Taps?' I said. 'No,' she said, 'Training of the Adult Poor Society.' Good heavens! Vicary, fancy how I trembled as more Taps flowed in! I felt I was a poor adult, and I didn't know what might happen to me. They each carried a bag, and were shown into the dining-room and sat solemnly round the table on high-backed chairs. I looked in through the window, because the whole thing seemed so mysterious to me. My cousin says it is a protest against Socialism. Now I fancy if they asked you to come and speak to them, you could tell them a little about the poor adults. Eh, Vicary? But it amuses the ladies, you know. I hear they are very sad because Miss Amice Kestell won't join them. They shook their heads off nearly, and declared she had Red Ideas. But all this is by the way. I want to know how little 'Liza is getting on. Her old grandmother was talking to me about her only yesterday. I said that I would tell you to call, if you would be so kind."

"Indeed, I will," said Jesse, smiling, for it was impossible not to smile at Mr. Guthrie's remarks.

"'Liza speaks of you as if you were the Juggernaut before whom she ought to throw herself down. By the way, an interesting fact turned up during our conversation. Old Mrs. Joyce says she remembers your grandmother coming to her when she, old Mrs. Vicary, first moved on to the Beacon. It was to borrow soap, I think; but the very fact seemed to raise her into another sphere. 'Mr. Vicary is a very fine gentleman now,' she said, 'but his grandmother once came, etc.' She doesn't think half so much of me because she says, 'you weren't from these parts, sir, and one cannot ever be sure of them as are stranger-born, though you're better than most.' Good gracious, Vicary, fancy any one trying to train the adult poor; where will they end? I should like to see my cousin in a cottage for a week. I shall set up a society of Taps; put rich instead of poor, and get the poor to form the Committee."

"My sister tells me that Miss Amice does a great work among the squatters in the forest," said Jesse.

"Well, yes, they look upon her as a being from another world; and, to say the truth, so do I. Here, Vicary, this way, please; I see Miss Heaton returning from Court Garden, so the Taps are over. Miss Heaton thinks the poor ought to be kept in their places, and says I am too free with them. Now I think I can slink home up by the Pools; by dinner-time my cousin will have forgotten the Taps, and I shall be able to look her in the face again. Good-bye, and don't forget to go and see 'Liza's grandmother, and don't make out that she's overworked, because they would send for her at once home. Between you, me, and the door-post, the adult poor do want training nearly as much as the rich; their feelings are so tender. They are all heart or none."

As Jesse proceeded toward Rushbrook House, Mr. Guthrie's words made him think of his own early history. He would certainly go and see Mrs. Joyce, for now that he was a man, the subject interested him; before, he had never cared much to know more than the bare fact that his mother had died at his birth, and his grandmother soon afterwards; that they had come from beyond the great ridge of forest which seemed to him, when a boy, to be the boundary of the world; and that only two months before his birth had the old grandmother and her daughter moved to a house on the Beacon. Positively, this was all he knew. He had never even before now heard his grandmother talked of by name, for 'Liza's grandmother had been living many years away from Rushbrook, and had only lately come back to her son's cottage. Perhaps only lately had Jesse fully grown into the feeling of love of his own order; only lately had he fully realised that, however much he himself might rise, yet his heart was now touched by the true feeling of humanity which, if it is not stifled in the presence of the rich, yet only grows to its full perfection among the poor. Symee, he knew, had no such sympathies, and he did not blame her. He had won his own freedom by work, and could enjoy it in any direction he liked; she was still timidly groping after that sense of freedom which is not really free, but fettered by custom.

Jesse had won his victory by days and nights of work; a work which could not be represented by any visible result, for it was spiritual labour in a spiritual kingdom.

This was the state of his mind when he reached the house, where his thoughts

would centre, he knew, now for many a year. He was conscious that he looked about him, hoping to see Amice Kestell; and he was conscious of disappointment when no one appeared; but in another moment Symee was with him in the avenue, and then his great brotherly love was all with her.

Symee's soft, gentle face was decidedly troubled, and as she clasped his arm after the first greeting, he knew something was the matter with her.

"You are late, Jesse, dear. I have been looking out for you for some time. Mr. Kestell is in this afternoon, and wants to see you in ten minutes; and then I have got leave to walk with you till six o'clock."

"That's right. But what's the matter, child?"

He often called her child because, compared with him, Symee was so young and weak, even though they were twins.

"Don't let's talk about it now. Tell me, how have you enjoyed your walk?"

"It seems to give me courage in every pore. I only wish—— But I'll keep all that till I've spoken to Mr. Kestell."

"Mr. Hoel Fenner was here on Sunday, and I heard Miss Elva say he was coming again. You may fancy how I looked at him, Jesse—because he had been so good to you."

"Yes, he has been very kind, and I hope we may see more of each other."

"Miss Elva was so strange and thoughtful when he had been, I can't help fancying——"

Jesse suddenly had the same idea, but would not allow his sister to say it; he was naturally unwilling to hear the secrets of others.

"That's not our business, is it, Symee? Now tell me how you are. What makes you pale?—and you look as if you had been crying."

"I had one of my bad headaches, yesterday, and Miss Amice was away, so I couldn't ask her to cure it. Fancy, Jesse, she actually stayed up all night in a dirty cottage, with some old woman who is very ill!"

Jesse's heart gave a leap. He had often heard before of Amice's kind actions; but only now did they seem to affect him personally.

"Why do you speak as if it was very dreadful, Symee? You would do as much."

Symee shook her head.

"No; I don't like dirt and poor people. I know it's horrid of me, Jesse, and I would do anything to please you, you know; but everybody can't like the same thing. Miss Elva can't bear poor people either."

Jesse was penitent at once. He often had to pull himself up for harsh judgement.

"Well, Symee, I promise you a very, very clean little home, even if we have to do with few luxuries. You don't mind work, I know."

Symee blushed and hesitated, then finally added:

"It's time now, Jesse, for you to go and see Mr. Kestell; and, dear Jesse, don't be rash."

"Rash, of course not. I'm not given to being rash, you silly child. By the way, Symee, if ever Miss Amice wants anything done for her in London, you must say I would be only too glad to go anywhere for her. I don't mean shopping," he added, laughing; "but if she wants things for her poor people, or——"

"I'll tell her; but now, Jesse, do go, and I'll be quite ready by the bridge when you come out."

Jesse tried not to feel annoyed by Symee's manner. Much as he loved her, sometimes her want of strength jarred against him; but the feeling was only momentary, as he said to himself, "I have enough given me for both. I believe it is the evil effect of having always to obey. There is nothing like being one's own master to teach one firmness. But she will soon learn when we live together."

The afternoon had slightly clouded over; the great brilliancy was gone; for what looked like thunder-clouds were rising from a long, straight bank above the horizon. Pile upon pile of hard round masses unfolded themselves with a majestic sweep which foreboded a storm. "But not just at present," thought Jesse, as the butler opened the door of Mr. Kestell's study and announced:

"Mr. Jesse Vicary."

Mr. Kestell was seated at his writing-table, and rose at once to greet him. So doing, his back was turned to the light, whilst Jesse stood in full view. The wavy chestnut hair, the frank, yet rather thoughtful eyes, the firm mouth—firm, though gentle—and the well-built, strong figure of the young fellow contrasted in every respect with that of his benefactor.

"Good afternoon, Jesse," said Mr. Kestell. "I am glad you have come; I was expecting you. Sit down and—I think you will soon hear reason."

Jesse sat down; but even this action seemed almost done under protest. He felt this was an important moment of his life, and he tried to prepare himself for meeting it. He would have preferred standing up and saying his say out boldly and firmly; but custom and courtesy often prevent spontaneous speech and action.

"I suppose you mean, sir—that is, I think you refer to Mr. Hoel Fenner's offer. I received a note from him at noon. He wrote it last night."

"After seeing me, I suppose. He spoke very kindly about you. I was, in fact, much gratified by his opinion of you; and he made an offer which I know many an inexperienced young man would have accepted without consideration. But happily, Vicary, you have an older head to think for you. I proved to Mr. Fenner, I think, that it would be most imprudent to throw yourself out of your present position on the chance of future—fame, which, as one knows if one has lived as long as I have, is often a Will-o'-the-wisp. I am not at all surprised, Vicary, at your being taken with the idea; but I have enough confidence in you to believe that you will not give in to this desire for change."

"It is no desire for change," said Jesse, very slowly. "I have long wished for this sort of work, and I have spent many hours in trying to qualify myself for some such employment."

"That is what all young men think. My dear Vicary, be advised, do not throw away certainty; do not oblige me to think less well of you."

Mr. Kestell's tone had not altered in the least; if he were pleading with Jesse, it was certainly not in the heat of the moment, for his words seemed very carefully chosen and weighed. Jesse, on the contrary, having previously made up his mind to be perfectly calm, was fast losing this state of feeling; he pushed his chair back and stood up, without being aware of his change of position, so much was his mind excited.

"Indeed, indeed, Mr. Kestell, you do not understand," he said, with deep earnestness. "I do value your good opinion, perhaps more than anything else; at all events, more than the opinion of any one else. Have I not given you



proofs of it again and again? You have done much, very much for me and Symee, and I am deeply grateful; but now I am a man, I have fought out many a battle alone, and at such times I have had no one to look to but myself and God. I don't wish to boast, but only to say that such things make one able to stand alone. I knew that from the time I first went to school I have had to look my position in the face. You saved me from a terrible fate, the fate of a workhouse boy, and to my dying day I shall remember this. And it was even more that you did for Symee. Thank God, she is now fit to stand alone; and here she has learnt nothing but good. Such things as these cannot be forgotten by any man who has a heart or a spark of gratitude in his nature; but yet, in spite of all this, Mr. Kestell, I feel that I am not any longer responsible to man for my actions, but to God. He has most unexpectedly opened this path for me; if there are objections—and every position has its objections—yet I will overcome them. You forget that it has also many advantages, and that if I refuse this offer, I may never in all my life get such another. If it were only for my own ambition, then, perhaps, I should believe I was mistaken; but it is for Symee's sake. Good as you have been to her, yet she deserves a home of her own, and if I can procure it for her, she shall have it."

"Symee will never wish to ruin your prospects; I believe she has too much good sense for that."

Mr. Kestell's voice was losing its gentleness; there was a slight increase of warmth in it, as if for a moment he were off his guard.

"Symee will certainly believe in my love for her. She will not oppose my wishes," said Jesse, firmly. He saw that nothing would now turn Mr. Kestell, and that the whole responsibility of the change must be taken on his own shoulders. Jesse was prepared to do this.

For a moment the old man was silent. He took up a paper-cutter and put it down again sharply. At last he, too, rose from his chair.

"Jesse, whatever rash thing you may choose to do, I cannot allow your sister to ruin her prospects. If you wish to retain my—my good opinion, you must stay where you are now, otherwise you must take the consequences for yourself. I shall also insist on Symee having fair notice and perfect freedom of action, and

I have not the least doubt that she will see the foolishness of your proposed change."

"You cannot part us against our will, sir," said Jesse, slowly, whilst the hot blood mounted to his cheeks. "If I accept this post, I shall ask Symee to come and live with me, and she will come."

"I think I can judge for her, and I trust Symee will be guided by wise counsels."

"Thank you, sir, for what you have done for her; but I am her brother, her only relation, and I shall study her happiness, even if she is too gentle and too much influenced to choose for herself."

It was now Mr. Kestell's turn to be annoyed.

"Then I can but say my last word, Vicary. I entirely disapprove of your conduct, and I refuse my consent to your giving up your present position, or to luring away your sister from a safe home. If you insist, I shall wash my hands of both of you, and I think the world will judge between us; but I hope you will not in the future talk any nonsense about gratitude."

Never had Jesse seen his benefactor look as he now did, or heard him speak in such a stern manner. His face had changed—a deadly pallor overspread his features, his hands shook visibly.

"Is that your last word?" said Jesse, going towards the door, his whole spirit rebelling against the injustice of the man whom he had looked upon as nearly perfect.

"Yes; but——" a sudden change took place in Mr. Kestell's manner, and he held out his hand.

"Come, Vicary, don't go away in anger; think better of this, and leave well alone."

Jesse did not see the outstretched hand, so entirely absorbed was he in the question at issue.

"I cannot, sir; in this case I must judge for myself, and I deny to any man the right of judging for me."

"You refuse to be guided?"

"I do; I shall accept the offer."

"For yourself, perhaps; but Symee will remain here."

"Not of her own free choice."

"Yes, of her own free choice."

Jesse had reached the door; his anger, that had been for one moment modified, rose again.

"I must ask her myself, sir, and this question shall be decided between us. I can allow no third person to come in."

"I leave you both free, perfectly free;

but remember, if once you take your sister away, from that day my doors are closed against you both. I will not speak of ingratitude, your own consciences are best able to judge your conduct."

Perhaps there is no accusation which an honest man finds more galling to bear than that of ingratitude. It acted so powerfully with Jesse that, without another word, he left the room, mechanically crossed the hall, and only woke up to the consciousness of where he was when he saw his sister waiting for him on the bridge. Her face was very pale, and she showed plainly that she was well aware of the drift of the conversation Jesse had been having. One look at his strangely-moved countenance revealed much more to her, and when he said:

"Come, Symee, don't let us discuss anything yet; let us get into a quiet place where no one will see us," she took his arm and followed in silence.

It spoke volumes for Jesse's self-control that he imposed on himself this waiting time, for fear of saying something he would regret.

### MONSTER GUNS.

THE word monster is the right one for the big guns of the present day. They are monsters indeed—the product of the highest mechanical knowledge and skill, applied to most elaborate and perfect machinery, the result being an instrument of destruction almost as formidable to those who employ it, as to the enemy against whom it is directed. The huge creature is of enormous cost to produce, and is the trouble and despair of all who have to do with it. The world would be thankful to be well rid of it; but in the terrible competition in the ways of death and destruction, the monster gun asserts itself as an inexorable necessity. As long as we and other nations have monster ironclads, we and they must go on building guns big enough to knock holes into them. Some day, perhaps, the ironclad may be rendered effete, by new inventions in the way of projectiles and explosives, and then there will be no further necessity for the monster gun. But till such a consummation is reached, if Britain is still to hold the seas, she must have big guns, and plenty of them. Big guns not only for the great ironclads, so that they may hold their own against all comers, but guns as big and

powerful for the redoubts and batteries that protect our naval stations, which must otherwise be at the mercy of an enemy's monster guns.

Comparatively happy and innocent were the days, not very far removed, when we could stack our big guns in rows for use when required, an occasional coat of paint being all that was required to keep them in a state of efficiency; and when a batch of guns could be turned out like so many loaves of bread when the occasion required. As long as the making of cannon was only an affair of casting and boring, there was no difficulty in keeping up the supply. But with the introduction of rifled ordnance, a new system of building up guns was necessarily adopted. And, curiously enough, this new system was a reversion to methods practised in the very infancy of artillery.

In fact, the big guns of an early period were of wrought iron, and consisted of a central core formed of longitudinal iron bars, enveloped by hoops. Such was the earliest of the big guns on record, the great cannon of Caen. This gun was made for the siege of St. Sauveur, a fortress occupied by the English in Normandy. The Castle stood among the rich but marshy plain of the Cotentin, prolific in beeves and butter. The fort was then deemed impregnable, and the siege, begun in 1373, had languished for more than a year. A blockade had been attempted, and the Castle surrounded with a ditch and bank supported by projecting towers; but the English had continually broken through the investment, sweeping the country of its cattle, and burning the faubourgs of Bayeux and St. Lô. The French then resolved to construct new engines of war, and bring them to bear upon the Castle. They had cannon, but they were of small calibre, and it was determined to create a monster gun.

Early in the following year the work was begun at Caen. The most renowned cannoners of the province of Normandy were assembled, together with the most skilful iron-workers; and there was a great iron industry in Normandy in those days, one Jean Nicolle de Billy, a famous smith, who deserves mention as the earliest constructor of great guns, being charged with the superintendence of the work. Then began the forging of huge bars, which were welded together about a circular core, and bound by rings of steel. More than a thousand pounds of iron were used in building up

this great gun-barrel; and when it was finished it was carefully bound round with strong cord, and the whole enveloped in hides. Evidently the cannoneers had not full confidence in the big gun, and by these precautions sought to lessen the disastrous effects of a possible "burst up." The cannon was finished in a month, the smiths working in relays both day and night, as well as three other cannons of a smaller calibre; and the siege train comprised also twenty-five cannons of copper, and five small iron ones carrying leaden bullets. At the same time the great stone balls for the big gun had been quarried and prepared, and all was ready to try the effect of the newly-created monster.

At the first discharge of the big gun the walls of the strong fortress began to crumble and to fall about the ears of the garrison. In a few days the place was found to be untenable, and the garrison demanded terms. They were allowed to depart, and embark for England with bag and baggage. The big gun had proved itself the master, and feudal towers and mediæval strongholds were thenceforth at its mercy. But people in England would not believe in the big gun; and the Captain of the garrison, one Thomas Katterton, was generally thought to have betrayed his trust for French gold. And some years afterwards, being publicly accused thereof, the matter was decided in single combat between himself and his accuser, when Katterton was slain, a result which was considered conclusive of the poor man's guilt.

The English, in their turn, acquired the art of making big guns, and Henry the Fifth, in his sieges of the Norman strongholds, made use of great cannon carrying huge balls of stone. Some of these stone balls were not long ago to be seen adorning the court-yard of the quaint old-fashioned "mairie" of Harfleur; while traces of King Henry's batteries, on the heights above, are still to be met with.

Later in the fifteenth century we hear of a "grosse bombard," used by the Turks, in the Siege of Constantinople, all in one piece, and weighing one thousand eight hundred pounds; and if we are to conclude that this was a cast-iron gun, it is a much earlier example than any in use among the Western nations. For, of the same period is the famous Scottish gun, Mons Meg, which still adorns the battlements of Edinburgh Castle—a built-up gun of bars and rings, after the model of the cannon of Caen, and, if tradition is to be believed,

put together in the same manner. The story of Brawny Kim and his seven sons, who forged the huge piece for the siege of the stronghold of the Douglas—Castle Thrave, in Galloway—may have a somewhat legendary aspect; but that some such big gun was forged by the native smiths for their King, is probable enough; though whether Mons Meg be she is another matter. Meg was "crackit" at last in firing a salute for the Duke of York, in the old Covenanting times; but she had lasted well, and had done good service, if we may credit her record of having been used at the siege of Dumbarton, 1489, and of "Norham's castled steep," 1497; to say nothing of the more or less doubtful Thrave, in or about 1452.

It was not till the year 1545 that cast-iron ordnance came in; but its advantages were so great that in a short time it superseded all other kinds of heavy ordnance, and held its ground for just three centuries. And under the régime of cast-iron, monster guns were neither practicable nor desirable. It was better to have guns that could be readily handled, and plenty of them, than a few unmanageable monsters. Besides, there is a limit, very easily reached, to the size of iron gun castings. As for ships' guns, they were for long of but small size, and generally cast in brass or bronze. The guns of the Spanish Armada were small; but, judging by such specimens as have been recovered, beautifully finished, and, indeed, as far as excellence of work is concerned, it would be difficult to beat the gun-founders of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In the great wars and sieges of the following age, iron artillery was rapidly developed in size and importance. Yet in 1717, we find that Woolwich Arsenal had a foundry for only bronze guns, and that heavy iron ordnance was provided by contractors. As our great iron-works increased and developed, cast guns could be turned out wholesale, and improvements in machinery resulted in increased accuracy of bore and adjustment. Yet there was no radical change in the manufacture of heavy guns, and a cannon that would throw a solid spherical ball of sixty pounds' weight, with an effective range of some twelve hundred yards, was regarded with complaisance as the most powerful arm that could be devised for ships or forts. The great naval battles of Nelson's time were fought with guns of nothing like that weight of metal: a thirty-two-pound gun

being, in a general way, the heaviest ordnance carried on board Her Majesty's ships.

With the general adoption of the rifled musket, which began at the date of the Crimean War, rifled cannon became a necessity for the artilleryman. Napoleon the Third rifled his guns, and by their aid he scored the victories of Magenta and Solferino. Armstrong in England, and Krupp in Germany, took up the manufacture of steel and rifled guns, and the processes of making great guns was completely revolutionised. Not that this change brought about the necessity for monster guns. That was indirectly due to improvements effected in explosive projectiles, and the consequent introduction of direct shell-fire into naval warfare. Thus in the first serious naval engagements fought after these changes—in the American Civil War, that is—it was found that an armoured ship, capable of throwing off an enemy's shells, held an ordinary unprotected ship-of-war entirely at its mercy. And thus the result of a few isolated combats in American waters threw the great naval Powers almost into a panic. From that time the famed wooden walls of old England were no more to be heard of, and a long and costly competition began, in which it was a vital necessity for England to take the lead. First, we must have ironclads strong enough to resist the most powerful guns that can be brought against them; and next, we must have still more powerful guns, to knock holes in other people's ironclads. Thus one monster begets another, and the huge, unwieldy ironclad must be armed with a huge gun, which is only not unwieldy because it is moved with elaborate and ingenious machinery.

Our first working examples of a really monster gun were commenced in 1878, when a forty or forty-three ton breechloading gun was designed. With all its weight of metal, the modern monster is by no means of the "muckle-mouthed" breed. The calibre of the forty-ton gun is twelve inches only, but it carries an elongated shot that weighs seven hundred and fifteen pounds, and the shot is driven by a charge of two hundred and ninety-five pounds of powder. Now, this twelve-inch breech-loader, which may be called the handy working gun of the British navy, costs seven thousand four hundred pounds, as delivered from the great works of Armstrong and Company at Elswick.

Then we come to the eighty-ton gun of sixteen inches calibre—the "Woolwich Infant," as it was jocosely called on its first appearance—alas! that the necessity should arise for a bigger baby than that! The "infant" costs ten thousand pounds, as turned out into the world from the Royal Gun Factory at Woolwich. She is fed with a nice little "bonne bouche" in the way of a cartridge eighty inches long, that is, a head taller than the tallest of our Grenadiers. Then you have a shot five feet long, a conical, winged projectile, with studs fitting so accurately into the rifling of the gun, that if you could set that gun on end, the shot would gently sink into its place—a shot that weighs some eighteen hundred pounds, and thus itself heavier by degrees than one of the monster guns of old times. The bellow of the "infant" when discharged is like an earthquake shock, and the great bolt, more formidable than any fabled bolt of yore, goes hurtling through the air with the roar of an express train, and with sufficient elevation will fly for a distance of seven or eight miles. The powder used in the monster gun is in itself a monstrous kind of powder—not in grains like ordinary gunpowder, but in flakes, as cocoa-powder, in knobs, as pebble-powder, or in little cubes, as prismatic powder. These powders burn more slowly than the ordinary charges, and thus exert their full force upon the projectile during its passage along the bore of the gun.

The latest development of the monster is the one-hundred-and-ten-ton gun, which carries a proportionately bigger bolt, with a greater charge of powder. These guns cannot be produced in large quantities, it is evident, or at short notice. The biggest of them take a period of two years to complete. Enormous as their strength may be, it is tried to the utmost by the immense charges of powder, and the resistance of the huge projectile. After firing one hundred and twenty rounds or so, the lining of the gun is so far injured that it requires renewal. And the slightest fault in material or workmanship, or mistake in the manipulation of the gun, may lead to direful consequences. The twelve-inch guns of the "Collingwood" and "Active" blew their chases away; a mishap on the "Thunderer" involved the wrecking of the gun, and the loss of valuable lives. There is no absolute safety to be had in dealing with earthquakes and volcanoes; neither is there in handling these terrible monsters.



As to the effect of the fire of monster guns in actual warfare, it can only be guessed at. The old sea-fights were terrible enough, with the roar of guns, the rattle of musketry, the clashing and splintering of timbers, the groans of the wounded and dying. But a fight between ironclads, armed with their monster guns, would be something almost too terrible for the imagination to grasp. Surely nothing that can be constructed with steel or iron could withstand the impact of that huge bolt—a ton or more in weight flying at the rate of twenty miles a minute, and striking fairly on a vessel's side. The first successful shot would decide the contest, and the great iron ship, with all its complicated mechanism, paralysed by the shock, would float a helpless wreck upon the waves.

It is quite possible, indeed, and much to be hoped, that this battle of monster guns may never be fought. The art of torpedo warfare may some day become so highly developed that ironclads will be pronounced so many useless death-traps, and the armoured ship may become extinct in its turn, like the armour-clad warrior. But we are a long way from such a result at present. We must still go on making monster guns, and we must not rest satisfied till not only our navy is supplied with the best and the biggest, but also every vulnerable point about our dock-yards and great commercial ports.

In the struggle for supremacy in big guns, England has its advantages in the skill and enterprise of those who conduct its great steel works. Sheffield casts the ingots of steel from which are forged the monster guns, and supplies alike the Royal Gun Factory, and the private makers of ordnance. But Krupp of Essen is a formidable rival. Krupp can cast an ingot of from fifty to sixty tons in weight, and the monster guns furnished by him to foreign Powers are in no way inferior to those of our great makers. France, too, has her Schneider at Le Creusot, where a steel ingot of one hundred tons has been cast successfully, and where monster guns of a very formidable character are turned out.

England and America are perhaps the most fertile in new inventions. And among the latest of these is the wire gun of Mr. J. A. Longridge; the gun being built up of successive coils of a thin steel ribbon, the whole forming a homogeneous mass, in which the outer, as well as the inner portions, bear their appropriate share in the strain upon the gun from the ex-

plosive gases liberated when the charge is fired. In this way we should have a most welcome decrease in the weight of our guns with the same ballistic power. The ribbon or wire gun seems to withstand the lateral pressure admirably; the chief doubt is as to whether it will stand the longitudinal strain which is so trying for guns built up of coils.

Another, and American, invention deals with the explosive power of dynamite, and undertakes to hurl a shell, containing five hundred pounds of that terrible explosive, to a distance of a couple of miles, when it explodes on striking, and deals destruction on everything within a given radius of the explosion. The use of dynamite shells has often been suggested, but, happily, they are impracticable for ordinary guns, as the shock of the discharge would explode the dynamite, and the engineer would probably be hoist with his own petard. But our inventor has devised a pneumatic tube—a big air-gun, in fact—from which the shell is expelled, like a pea from a pea-shooter, without any dangerous initial shock. The American Government has, it appears, already fitted up a vessel with the necessary machinery and the pneumatic tube which is to put the new invention to the test.

But one would think that, before long, a general understanding would be arrived at, among civilised nations, to limit in some way the resort to such means of wholesale destruction.

## CURIOSITIES OF COMPOSITION.

IT is the pride and glory of our Public Schools that they teach no English. French, German, mathematics, if you please; Grecian history, Grecian literature, Greek language and composition; Latin language, literature, history, composition—yes; but English—no, never. England has no literature or history worth reading, no classics worth studying—none, at least, in comparison with other countries; and an ounce of the foreign is worth a ton of the homespun.

To be sure, Macaulay has left it as his opinion that no man can ever hope to do anything great except in his own language, the language of his childhood and youth: "No noble work of imagination, as far as we recollect, was ever composed by any man except in a dialect which he had learned without remembering how or when, and

which he had spoken with perfect ease before he had ever analysed its structure." But Macaulay did not know much about these things. At all events, we have advanced greatly since his time, and therefore dead and foreign languages are taught in England; but not English.

The Civil Service Commissioners, and others in charge of public examinations, have recognised and responded to this tendency, by cutting down the marks obtainable in English, until now the obnoxious subject is practically boycotted at all competitive tests.

"Abeunt studia in mores," and that negatively as well as positively; and the ideas entertained on English matters, literary and historical, and the excursions made in English composition by the scholars of our public schools are worthy of all admiration. The writer has had, for the last six years, to deal with young gentlemen straight from Eton, Harrow, Winchester, Rugby, Westminster, Cheltenham, Marlborough, Charter House—in fact, from nearly all our public schools—and it may be asserted, without fear of contradiction, that the performances of these young gentlemen in Geography, English History, and Composition, have been, as a rule, unparalleled—unapproachable by any other civilised nation, and are, in fact, "facile princeps" in the department of the unique.

It is a fact that some of these gentlemen placed Mount Everest, Leghorn, and Lake Chad in Scotland; Timbuctoo and Elsinore in the United States; Buenos Ayres in Burmah; Bagdad in Africa; Salt Lake City in Palestine; Lausanne in Spain; Fiume and Jena in China; and Benares in Ireland. By others we have been told that Waterloo was one of Marlborough's victories, and that Oudenarde was one of Wellington's; that Prince Charles Edward, the Young Pretender, was King of France in 1828; that Glencoe was a Scotchman, that the Crystal Palace was founded by Cardinal Wolsey, that Shakespeare wrote two hundred plays, and that one of his best was "The Canterbury Tales;" that Sir Philip Sidney defended Acre in 1799, that Thomas Moore was beheaded by Henry the Eighth, that Luther was a Pope, and that Matthew Arnold was a man who was concerned in the Aylesbury election lawsuit in Queen Anne's reign. "Is Addison alive now?" asked one of these scholars once. "Dean Swift," said another, "I

don't understand; who was he? Was his Christian name Dean, or how?"

Our main purpose at present, however, is to set forth some gems of authorship, curiosities of composition, from the pens of these budding Burkes and juvenile Macaulays, as displayed in Essays, or in papers written in answer to English History questions. It might be imagined that some of these are jokes or forgeries. They are not. They are warranted to be genuine "ipsissima verba" of the pupils themselves, copied down from the original, along with the name, date, and occasion—the latter "not for publication." But, surely no warrant is necessary, for these grammatical forms and idioms cannot be coined at will, and are incapable of imitation. As with the broken English of a foreigner, it is easy to detect that which is genuine and spontaneous from that which is manufactured for a purpose. There is a ring of artless error and unadulterated blundering about the true metal which no specious counterfeit can produce. But let the extracts speak for themselves. The following are taken from Essays: \*

"James Watt was at first a wretched man; but he made great discoveries in steam, and at last pulled himself up to the top of the tree of life."

"Music soothes the savage breast, some men say, and so it did in the case of David and Solomon."

"About this time a Turk came to London, and set up a coffee shop at which beverage he had received a reputation from his Mahometan friends at making it."

"An overloaded donkey or horse which is doing its best to do its utmost."

"In conclusion a linguist, in these days of electricity and steam, can always bring his languages into use, whether at examinations or in Society."

The following contain some valuable information:

"The Armada was to take the Duke of Panama and his troops from the coast of France and to land them in England."

"Elizabeth's reign lasted from fifteen fifty-three to seventeen hundred and two."

"The horse, whose origin was found to be in Arabia and Australia, is our chief domestic animal."

"Also we may call the dog a domestic

\* The punctuation and spelling of the original are preserved.

animal although in this country we get no use out of him."

"Of course if we do as to our capabilities beatings will not make us do more."

"The person who says this [*"de mortuis nil,"* etc.] would not think of saying it if he were alive. . . . It is also very bad form and shows the worst form of ill-nature, because for one great and important reason is that the dead person leaves friends and relatives behind them. . . . As a saying says—'One should do unto all men as they would they do unto us.'"

Talk about Irish bulls, what Hibernianisms can surpass some of the following?

"The Temperance Society have more or less started coffee-houses and reading rooms, etc., to amuse the working people. . . . No man ought to be made to join these societies unless he offers first."

"If you go to the theatre constantly you get to like it so much that you become dissatisfied if you do not go there often."

"If it were not for some kind of public press people would be ignorant of many subjects, and the most of knowledge would only be confined to those who know it. . . . But whether it would be wise to abolish the free press is not true."

"Then in autumn in the country all out-door pleasures still continue till the very last which are difficult to obtain in a town unless one walks some miles out of it."

"Pets are sometimes made of horses."

The following excerpts are difficult to be classified, but they are choice:

"Of course of the two classes the domestic animals are the most profitable for one reason and the chief one, because they are used for food, and another for their skin."

"It has sometimes been heard of that from a mere jest on a young person, it has led to all kinds of effects, and frighten them for life. . . . It has often been heard of a person being frightened to ask another for anything are even frightened to speak."

The following essay on the "Credibility of Ghosts and Apparitions" is too perfect and harmonious to distort by quotation; it must be given entire.

"Once it was quite a common thing to believe in ghosts and apparitions, but lately it has been greatly dropped. It is not a matter of discussion whether there is an existence of ghosts because it is mere imagination. Perhaps there are a few persons who still believe in them, but no sensible person can. Perhaps the cause of

belief in apparitions may be from imagination. A person sees a shadow, which may look uncommonly like a figure of some being, he immediately goes away with the idea that it is a ghost. Another reason, we can imagine is, after having read about dreadful stories, haunted houses, and many other things, one is apt to imagine them to be true, and quite forget the true idea. From a mere practical joke, by putting a sheet, or anything white, on a pole and after the shape of an imaginary ghost at night may lead many to believe it is a ghost. There is a story told of Luther while working in his study he perceived something of a light shade on the wall, he immediately took up the ink pot and threw it at the apparition. This took place in the castle of Warburg where the mark can still be seen in the wall. Such stories are of constant occurrence. The belief in the existence of ghosts is something like believing in superstitions, although many a sensible person firmly belief in superstitions but not in ghosts. Many of these superstitions are of ancient origin and therefore there is perhaps more reason for them being truer. As we have said before the belief in the existence of ghosts is mere imagination for it could be nothing else. If we only wished we could imagine anything almost we could like. We see how imagination leads some people astray; from constant imagination they forget reality, and the original is quite lost sight of. Often the cause of the credibility of the existence of ghosts may be from being frightened when young over which they have not recovered. It is a senseless thing to do, it not only leads the person to be frightened afterwards but also it may have its present effects."

The following items are from papers on English History, and should be weighed, considered, chewed, and digested:

"Alfred the Great was the first to introduce time, which he did by means of candles."

"Roger Bacon by means of his custom of writing books became very poor."

"The Pope wished him (Roger Bacon) to write, but paper and pencils were so dear that he could not do so till some time after when he wrote a book called 'Opus Majus.'"

"Van Tromp swept the Channel with a brougham at his mast head."

"Newton invented the fluxions of light."

"Marlborough is first heard of at the battle of Turenne."\*

"Cranmer was a weak-minded man and went to the stake recanting."

"Eliot was one of the best eloquists in England."

"The clergy clung to the King because they were afraid of the Lollards, and the King turned merchant and made vast sums of money."

"William I. was very strong and had a savage countenance and never allowed himself to be tampered with."

"The Friars were instituted by religious fanatics who did not like monks who only drank wine and eat."

"Lottery loans were loans borrowed and repaid at very low interest. But some of the money which was borrowed Government in repaying it—the people who put it were chosen by lot and had it paid back at a very high interest."

"The friars were divided into sections—white, black, and grey. They went round the country preaching and curing diseases. They also spoke on sanity† and cleanliness."

"Newton invented the laws of gravitation and the motions of the planets."

We pause—not for want of material, but for want of space. The above extracts would have interested Macaulay—Macaulay, whose proverbial "schoolboy" had all knowledge and understanding, and was equally conversant with ancient and modern languages, English, European, and general history and literature, geography, and mathematics.

When the young gentlemen who are responsible for the above sentences—and whose ages range from sixteen to twenty-three—enter their respective professions, and put their legs under the aristocratic mahogany of Belgravia, it would be interesting to know what part they will take in the after-dinner conversations. An officer from Bombay perhaps is present, and the conversation turns on Assaye and its battle; or a barrister is there who is an ardent angler, and Walton is spoken of; or a friend of the host's has entered the diplomatic service, and is about to start for South America, and the discourse turns on Buenos Ayres; or "Charles the First" is about to be performed at the Lyceum, and that subject becomes matter of discussion. How the young Harrovian,

Rugbeian, or Etonian will fall a-thinking! How he will wonder whether Assaye was won by Clive or Warren Hastings; whether Walton was a barrister, or a professional fisherman who kept a punt on the Thames; whether "Charles the First" was written by Shakespeare or by one of his predecessors; whether Buenos Ayres is two towns or one, and whether it is anywhere near Buda-Pesth! Verily these things—if he be a thinking man—will be to him a sore puzzle and a torment. Happy for him if he be blest with sisters, for they will be able to set him right.

## THE STORY OF ALICE LYNTON.

### A COMPLETE STORY.

#### CHAPTER I.

"No, Keziah, it is not the least use talking about it. She must come here. There's no help for it."

"Then, what's the good o' grumblin' at it?" demanded Keziah, with a barely repressed air of fury and indignation.

"No good," I admitted with a sigh, as I glanced round my dainty little drawing-room, and thought how recklessly the expected visitor would probably treat all my pet bits of furniture, my rare china, my numerous nicknacks that I had taken me nearly forty years to collect.

"Then I wudn't do it," declared my elderly handmaiden, with a terrible snort, that filled me with fear, and added to my perplexities, for I stood rather in awe of my grim-looking servant; and, as she had lived with me for twenty years and more, and knew my ways thoroughly, I was afraid of losing her, and having to supply her place with a youthful piece of impertinence, in pink cotton and lilac ribbons, who would turn the house topsy-turvy, and send me into a fever with her flighty ways.

"No," she went on, fixing me with her sharp little black eyes, "if Master Jack's wife's got to come here, and there ain't no cure fur it, why, let her come, and don't you bother yerself about it. 'What can't be cured must be endured,' ye know."

"Yes, that is all very well," I began; but I was talking to the chairs, and the tables, and the nicknacks. Keziah had vanished; I was left alone in my glory, and with my perplexities.

I tried to amuse myself by settling some of the spring blooms floating about in the big family punch-bowl, in vases, and jars;

\* It is conjectured that this refers to his having "served under" Turenne.

† Query—"Sanitary matters."



but I did not take the same interest as usual in my occupation, and I found myself sighing irritably, every now and then.

The fact was, my nephew—my only nephew, and the apple of my eye—had written, some weeks before, to ask me to receive his wife, whose health he said had suffered from the rigours of the Canadian winters, into my house, until his regiment, which was expecting orders daily, should arrive in England, and he be able to give her a home of her own.

Of course I wrote back at once, and said "Yes." I had never refused Jack anything in his life, and I was not going to begin now, when he was in such a fidget about his dear Alice's health. Nevertheless, I was not very well pleased at the prospect of receiving a fashionable young woman into my house, who would probably laugh at my ways, and ridicule my old-maidish habits. For an old maid I was, of fifty. I am not going to deny it. Indeed, why should I?

Still, though no one ever asked me to change my state of single blessedness for one of double misery, and though I therefore had no chick or child of my own, I had brought up my only sister's boy, Jack Lynton, and loved him just as well as though he was my own, which is saying a good deal; yet I know no one could have been more to me than dear Jack. When he grew up, I gave him his choice of a profession, and he chose the army. He had plenty of money, so I made no objections; and it was all very well while the regiment remained in England, but when it was ordered to Canada I thought my heart must break. However, it did not. Hearts are made of stern stuff nowadays, and it takes a marvellous lot to damage them. I continued to live and thrive, and even sustained the shock of the announcement of his approaching marriage, six months later, with a certain amount of equanimity. Of course he asked my consent to it, and equally of course I gave it, for where would have been the use of withholding it? He was of age, and his own master in every way, and he could do as he liked; and he did. He married this French-Canadian, and declared himself the happiest man in the world.

I was mildly jealous, and almost hated the mere thought of her. I had had the monopoly of darning his socks and putting buttons on his shirts all his life, and I ardently desired to retain it. No giddy girl could or would knit him such blue and

red silk socks as I manufactured for him, or turn out such faultless shirts, for I never let him don one unless manufactured by my hands, and I sent a parcel out to him regularly twice a year, which he duly acknowledged with grateful thanks.

He sent me half-a-dozen different photos of his wife. He was evidently proud of her, and she was pretty, undeniably and uncommonly pretty. Only gazing at her fair pictured face with eyes sharpened by love, I thought it a trifle insincere-looking, and that the heavy-lidded, languid eyes could hide more than they revealed.

Still, she was a lady, though absolutely penniless, this Alice du Pryé; and I thanked Heaven that he had not made one of those terrible *mésalliances* that young men perpetrate with such utter disregard for the feelings and wishes of their friends; and I considered myself bound to receive her in my house, give her a home, and play the part of mother to her, until her husband arrived to look after her, and take the rather unwelcome responsibilities off my shoulders. I did not feel altogether happy or comfortable as I sat there arranging my daffodils and violets, and trying to make the sprays of hyacinth look as little pokerish as possible.

She was evidently, from the style of her dress, one of those women who keep in the front rank of the fashions, and always have the last new thing, whereas I consider it better and more economical for a woman to get a thorough good dress, once in three years, and make it do, with the help of two or three every-day ones. Moreover, I liked to have forty winks after dinner undisturbed, was fond of a game of cribbage with my neighbour, Lawyer Smiles, three or four times a week, liked a cut out of a plain joint, detested made dishes, and kickshaws, and adored Fido, my little King Charles spaniel, who was, I must admit, rather fat—so fat, indeed, that it was difficult to tell which was his head and which his tail, for he resembled an animated ball of long hair.

Now, the coming of Alice Lynton might upset and disturb all my ways and habits; and, when one is fifty, one objects strongly to being disturbed. The greater part of those fifty years I had spent alone, and certain things occurred at certain hours in my establishment with clockwork-like regularity. I felt it would be a grievous thing if new habits and new ways were introduced.

However, I need not have troubled myself.

When my niece-in-law appeared she fell into all my ways with lamb-like docility—a docility which astonished me, for she hardly looked one of the meek sort. There was a lurking gleam in the splendid brown eyes, a haughty curl about the faultless mouth, a dilatation about the nostrils that told of fiery temper. She was much more beautiful than her photograph had led me to suppose. Her skin was just the most lovely I have ever seen. It was like the petal of a white flower, clear, and exquisitely delicate, without a tinge of colour, save in the lips—they were brilliant vermilion. Her hair was of a dull gold colour, several shades lighter than her brows; while her lashes were intensely black, and made the gazelle-like eyes look darker and deeper. I did not wonder at Jack's infatuation after seeing her. It was a dangerously alluring face—one a man could hardly look on and not love.

She did not seem to me to be quite happy. I thought at first she was anxious about her health; but after she had been with me for some weeks, I came to the conclusion that she had a secret, and was suffering in consequence. I tried to win her confidence, but failed utterly. That proud, shy, self-tormenting nature could not readily turn to a stranger for help in its sore need. She stood alone, and fought her terrible battle against self and unholy longings alone. Afterwards I knew, and understood, and felt some pity in the midst of all my condemnation. Then it was a mystery to me, an enigma I could not solve. As the days wore on, and it grew near the time for Jack's arrival, she grew more restless, and queer, and from one or two things I gathered, with a strange sense of indignation and pain, that she dreaded his coming.

"Why?"

That was what I asked myself twenty times a day. Why should she dread the coming of the husband she had married apparently for love? True, Jack had eight hundred a year; but then he was such a handsome, debonaire fellow, I could not believe any woman would marry him for his money. He was just one of those men women go mad about—who hold a mysterious, irresistible charm for the other sex.

She must love him. Therefore, why fear his coming? I tried not to think about it. I busied myself in preparing his room, and knitting a dozen pairs of new socks for him, leaving his wife pretty

well to her own devices. She hadn't many friends. Now and then one or two called. Her most frequent visitors were a Major Denzil and his wife, though they were so much alike they might easily have been taken for brother and sister.

Somehow or other, I did not like this dashing Major. There was something false to me in his cold, brilliant smile, his artificial manner, and coxcombish way, and I took to not appearing when they were present, my absence not seeming to be noticed by the young trio. Occasionally Alice spent the day with the Denzils, and generally came back with an unusual flush on her pale cheeks, and an unwonted animation in her manner; and I knew the Major rowed her about a good deal in his skiff, for my garden stretched to the river-side, and more than once, to my astonishment, I saw him leisurely pulling her to the landing-place. I say astonishment, because on each and every one of these occasions I had fancied she was lying down in her room, resting after some fatigue; and I began to wish Jack would come, for I felt quite unequal to the responsibility I had accepted, and was anxious to resign it. For what could I do? Though I disliked the Denzils, I could not forbid her intercourse with them, and my hints she only smiled at with cool and superb impertinence.

## CHAPTER II.

"WHAT is the news?" she asked, languidly, one sultry August morning, as she sat toying with her cup, her eyes, though, fixed on the letter the postman had just brought me, and which she knew was from Jack, for she had glanced eagerly at the writing as Keziah handed it to me. "When does he return?"

"Very soon," I replied, joyfully.

"When?" she reiterated, in monotonous tones.

"He doesn't say which day he will arrive, so that he may not disappoint us; but it will be very soon," I replied, glancing at her; and I was amazed to see that she was fearfully pale, and that in the large eyes was a hunted, agonised expression—one which I had seen there before, only not so plainly.

"What's the matter?" I asked, concernedly. "Don't you feel well?"

"The old pain here," she replied, laying her hand on her heart, while she tried to force her pale lips to smile.

"You must see Curzon again," I remarked.

"He does me no good."

"Jack will take you to a specialist."

"Jack?" she repeated, in a dazed kind of way, as though not understanding.

"Yes. If he comes to-night, I shall advise him to take you to-morrow or next day."

"If he comes to-night!" she repeated again, as though aghast. "Do you think he will come to-night, Aunt Jane?"

"He may," I replied, staring at her in astonishment, for she was shivering as if ague-stricken. "I shall be glad, Alice, if he does come," I went on, gravely, "for I am anxious about you in more ways than one."

"Anxious about me!" she echoed, raising her large, unutterably sad eyes to mine. "Why?"

"Your state of health worries me. You're not so well as when you came here. You're so feverish, and restless. And then—the Denzils," I concluded, with considerable hesitation.

"What of them?" she asked, all signs of languor vanishing from her tone and manner.

"I don't like them, child."

"Indeed! Why not?"

Her voice was cold, her eyes glittering like stars as she fixed them on me.

"I—I—can—hardly tell," I stammered, feeling much embarrassed under that steady gaze.

"I should think not," she rejoined, icily, a red streak mounting to each pale cheek and burning there furiously.

"Only," I went on, taking courage as I thought of Jack, "they seem to me worldly and—and—fast, and not altogether desirable companions for you."

"They are not more worldly than nine-tenths of the people one meets in society every day," she said, hastily taking up the cudgels in their defence at once.

"Possibly not," I admitted, reluctantly. "Society and I parted company long ago."

"Yes; that is just it. You know nothing of the present state of the fashionable world. Because people are merry and light-hearted now, and seek all the amusement they can get, instead of looking sanctimonious and singing psalms, as in your young days, you say they are bad."

"My dear!" I exclaimed, somewhat shocked, "I did not say that they were bad."

"You insinuated it. You said they

were fast, and undesirable companions for me," she retorted, fixing her shining, miserable-looking eyes again on my face.

"I certainly don't approve of Mrs. Denzil," I said, summoning all my courage and speaking very firmly, "as a constant companion for you. She is a mass of affectation, and artificial to the last degree, both inwardly and outwardly. I am certain she is insincere, and her hair and complexion are 'got up' to such an extent that she has all the appearance of a fourth-rate actress."

"And the Major," she asked, in a low, hoarse tone, "what do you think of him?"

"A man I should put no faith or trust in," I replied with decision, having a curious feeling that there was a great deal at stake, and that I ought to speak strongly. "A man of strong passions and unbridled desires. One who would let nothing stand in the way of their gratification, and who would fling aside the object of them, when sated, with as little compunction as most men would an old glove."

"Ah!" she murmured faintly, clasping her hands, with her usual familiar gesture, over her heart.

"His ideas of honour, too, must be very rudimentary," I continued, cuttingly, urged on by some irresistible power to speak in a way totally foreign to my usual tame-tabby-cat style, "to permit of his paying another man's wife such close and pointed attention, as he has paid you during the last few months; and I think, if you really loved Jack, you wouldn't allow another man to speak to you and beau you about, as you do Major Denzil."

"If I really loved Jack," she repeated, in a dazed fashion.

"Yes," nodding my head sagely. "If you did, you wouldn't, you know; and I wonder his wife allows it. She must be a very extraordinary sort of person to look on so calmly while he coolly makes love to you."

"His wife?" she repeated again, as if barely comprehending.

"I said so; and now, Alice, I think you had better go and lie down, and keep quiet. You look dreadfully ill. It won't do to meet Jack with that ghastly face, if he should come this evening."

"Do you think he will come this evening?" she queried, in strange, monotonous voice.

"I can't tell you for certain. He may

not come for three or four days. But there is one thing I must ask of you, and that is that you will not go to the Denzils or hold any intercourse with them until he comes."

"I am going there to-night after dinner," she rejoined, with a sullen lowering of the heavy white lids.

"I beg you will not do so," I said, quickly.

"I must. I have promised."

"Can you not break your promise?"

"No, I cannot break it," and as she spoke our eyes met, and something in hers, a look of unutterable, hopeless misery, made me shiver, as though a cold blast had blown on me.

"You could if you wished," I told her, sharply.

"No," she said, drearily. "There are some things we cannot do even when we wish to. Fate, or our evil genius, is too strong for us. But I promise you one thing, Aunt Jane," with a wan, ghostly smile, "I will not go to the Rosaries after to-night."

"Then I suppose I must be content with that," I said, reluctantly, as she turned and left the room.

I rang the bell for Keziah to clear the breakfast-things, and then tried to interest myself in my usual daily duties. But there was no denying it, my heart was in a flutter, and I felt uneasy and anxious about Alice.

I did not see her at luncheon. She had it sent up to her room, and she did not appear again until six o'clock, when we had dinner. She looked very pale, and her eyes were heavy and dark-rimmed; and the rich black silk dress she wore added to her sombre appearance and the ghastliness of her face. I thought it a strange gown for her to put on, for the night was intensely hot and sultry, and I knew she had several pretty white ones. However, I wisely refrained from making any remark, and she volunteered no information, so we sat opposite each other in moody silence, trifling with our dinner, and making a pretence of eating, for it was evident neither of us had any appetite.

She rose abruptly when it was over, and left the room without saying a word. I heard her go up the stairs and into her bedroom, which was over the dining-room, and then I, too, got up, and walking across the hall to the drawing-room, sat down by the open window, and began to

knit diligently, looking out every now and then to watch the shadows lengthen, and the stars begin to twinkle in the blue vault of heaven.

I had left the door wide open, for the heat was so great, and as the Louis Quatorze clock on the mantelshelf struck eight, I saw a black-robed figure come swiftly down the stairs, and knew it was Alice. She paused for a moment by the door, and turned her head. Her face was startlingly, horribly pale, and its pallor was intensified by the black lace mantilla thrown over her hair, and twisted round her throat.

"So you are going?" I said, quietly. "When will you be back? Remember, Jack may come to-night. You ought to be here to meet him."

She made a slight dissentient movement with her head, and then turning, walked swiftly through the hall with the same noiseless tread as she had descended the stairs with. I watched her glide over the lawn, and disappear in the shadows beyond without a word more of protest.

What was the good? She was wilful and determined. She would do just as she pleased, and I could not stop her. I had said as much as I dared in the morning. Only I began to wish fervently Jack would arrive, and take this responsibility off my unwilling hands.

As though in response to my silent prayers, there was the sound of wheels about nine o'clock, and Jack descended from a fly, and rushed in, and began embracing me ardently.

"Where is Alice?" he asked, eagerly, looking round, after the hugging was over.

"She has gone to the Denzils'. She did not think you would come to-night," I explained.

"Oh! the Denzils'. Let me see—who are they?"

"Canadian folk, she told me, from Montreal. Rather a pretty little woman, and a tall, moustached man, the Major."

"Major Denzil? Ah, yes! I remember. Brother and sister. A trifle rapid, but amusing company."

Brother and sister! You might have knocked me down with a feather! Why had they been introduced to me as husband and wife?

"Where are they living?" he went on, not noticing my agitation and astonishment.

"At the Rosaries," I managed to reply, with tolerable steadiness.



"Then we will walk across and fetch her. It is such a little way."

"Yes," I responded, mechanically, picking up a light shawl and throwing it over my shoulders.

I followed him.

The Rosaries was the next house to mine, and our gardens were only separated by a copse or grove. When we emerged from this, to my intense astonishment, we came face to face with Major Denzil, smoking a huge cigar, and even in my anxiety and distress of mind I noticed he was not, as usual, in evening dress, but wore a grey travelling suit something similar to Jack's.

"This is my nephew, Captain Lynton," I explained, coldly. "We have come to fetch my niece."

"I think we have met before," said the Major, with some slight embarrassment.

"Yes, in Canada," chimed in Jack, in his cheery tones, quite ready to shake hands; but Denzil did not offer his.

"Yes," he agreed. Then turning to me, he said: "Mrs. Lynton has not been here to-night, Miss Torrens, though we did expect to have the pleasure of seeing her."

"Not here!" I gasped, aghast. "Then where did she go an hour back, when I saw her pass the drawing-room door and come in this direction?"

"That I cannot tell you," he replied, quietly, meeting my eyes unhesitatingly; "but we have seen nothing of her to-night."

"Jack," I muttered, in a trembling whisper, as I clutched his arm, "she has been ill and out of sorts all day. I wanted her to promise not to go out. Where can she be?" and instinctively my horrified eyes glanced towards the river.

Jack turned pale, and suggested a search through the copse and garden, in which Denzil joined. But though every place was searched, no trace of her was found.

"Try the house," suggested the Major, in husky tones.

Accordingly, we went up the pathway, into the hall, and Jack called "Alice, Alice," loudly. Still there was no answer. With quaking heart and shaking limbs, I led the way up to her room. The door stood wide open; the window was thrown up, and through it streamed the bright moon-rays, making it nearly light as day, and showing a dark-clad figure sitting at the writing-table, its head resting on its outstretched arms.

"Alice, Alice, my dearest," cried Jack, springing to her side and taking her in his arms. "How you have startled us!"

The next moment he gave a loud cry.

"She is dead!"

There was another cry, choked and strangled at its birth, yet terrible all the same, and I knew it was the Major who gave utterance to it, as he stood in the doorway as immovable as if carved in stone, never making the slightest attempt to go nearer and look at the ghastly burden in Jack's arms.

From his stony, agonised face, my eyes travelled to the writing-table, and on it I saw a letter. In a moment it flashed across me that she had been writing to Jack, a confession of something which would be discreditable to her memory, and now could do him no good; and, quick as a thought, I transferred it to my pocket. Then, in all haste, I got Keziah to summon the doctor, and did what I could to restore animation to Alice's frame, and console Jack.

In both these attempts I was unsuccessful, and when the doctor came, after a slight examination, he declared she was dead, and had been quite two hours—Heart disease. If, therefore, Alice died a little before eight, who, or what, was the figure I saw glide down the stairs and stand at the drawing-room door, as the clock struck that hour?

Poor Jack was quite broken-hearted and inconsolable, and long before his leave was up rejoined his regiment, it having volunteered for service against the Zulus, declaring that the only thing to save him from madness was hard fighting.

After he left, I summoned courage, one day, to read the last lines Alice Lynton's hand had ever penned. It was a letter to her husband, begging his forgiveness for her sin against him. A mad, wild, broken-hearted letter; and from it I gathered that she had met, and loved, Denzil some years before; but both being poor, marriage between them was forbidden by her father. Then my poor Jack met and fell in love with her beautiful face, and she, obeying her arbitrary parent, married him for the sake of his eight hundred a year.

Then came the voyage to England. An unfortunate one, for on board the "City of Trent" she met Denzil and his sister, who had come in for a little money, and were going to England to take possession of it. The old affection—crushed and forced back—woke again with redoubled

force, and at last, after desperate struggles and vain repining, Alice Lynton consented to forget her duty, to give up all woman holds dear, and fly with Gerald Denzil, on the night her adoring, trusting husband was expected to arrive.

Death mercifully stepped in and saved her from the stigma of dishonour, and inefaceable disgrace and misery.

Ah! poor humanity. So frail! So fair! Of the two men who loved her, I think the Major was most to be pitied; for Jack still believed her to have been a pure, stainless creature, worthy of his regret and affection; while Denzil knew that she was weak and false, untrue to her marriage vows, and her honour, and that, moreover, she died with horrible suddenness, when on the eve of committing a great sin.

I never think of that close, sultry August evening without a chill shudder running through me from head to foot, and an air as if from the Catacombs surrounding me.

#### THE WAYS OF EXPERIENCE.

It may seem something of a bull to say that experience is probably the best training a man may have. And yet I do not think it is. For there are many men to whom the solution of riddles, of which the word "experience" is the epitome, does not bring joy, and who were happier far, dull and unenlightened, in a cottage by a hill, than in the heart of a metropolis, all the manifold pulse-beats of which are fully known to them.

Not every one, then, should go to school to gain experience.

For the majority, however, who live by action rather than thought, there is no college to compare with it. It gives strength and courage, and that self-knowledge which is better even than either strength or courage. There is no more accomplished person than an accomplished man of the world, to whom experience is as a tonic, and who, nevertheless, keeps his heart warm within him. The words of Browning's Bishop Blougram are his words, and have better justification in him than they had in the Bishop:

I know the special kind of life I like,  
What suits the most my idiosyncrasy,  
Brings out the best of me, and bears me fruit  
In power, peace, pleasantness, and length of days.

Indeed, experience may be said to be the leaven without which no man can attain,

intellectually and spiritually, his full stature. Perhaps the converse proposition may be stated: that it depends upon experience also whether a man shall sink to the full measure of the degradation of which he is capable. This, however, involves a knotty question: nothing less than the solution of the problem about character, whether or no it is a fixed quantity in each individual, not to be enlarged or diminished, susceptible only of development. Schopenhauer held that it was a fixed quantity; so also did Carlyle, one of whose favourite theories "was that no man was mendable; so that if a man is a scoundrel the only way is to put him into a hole in a bog, with a hurdle over him, in the old German fashion."

Such a course of action might, perhaps, tend towards the amelioration of society; but I am afraid we should find that there were more scoundrels, of Carlyle's kind, than bogs to hold them. It was the notion of a man bred up in an atmosphere of Calvinism; and, indeed, the idea that all characters are not alike capable of ennoblement is consoling to philosophers rather than encouraging to the rest of us.

Some think that "experience" is all but synonymous with a round of dissipation, reckless expenditure, and riotous living. It is a childish and absurd fancy, and chiefly in the thoughts of unfledged youths. Could there be, in fact, a more fatuous misconception of life than the belief that he alone knows life, or is experienced, who has plunged himself, to the eyebrows, in the vortex of debauchery of the world's greatest cities?

To me it is as if a man boasted of his knowledge of Nature after a narrow escape from death by suffocation in the thick mire of a moorland's ditch. It is a parallel case with that of those Hungarian peasants of whom the traveller Paget tells us that they "cannot see the use of drinking what will not make them drunk." Ask a man, who has acquired experience in such a mode, what his experience is worth; and, if he have any honesty left in him—a doubtful case—he will surely reply, "Less than nothing."

—It were bold in a man to decide the worth and nature of experience, in general, to women. Doubtless the omniscient lady is well steeled against the hazards of life. But she cannot be in the same plane as the man in the like case—at least, until we are all resolved that the ideal woman shall have the same commendatory

faculties as the ideal man. Nor does she receive the esteem and even admiration from her own sex—less experienced than she—that the man often gets from his fellow-men. To tell the truth, it seems, indeed, that experience in worldly matters is an improper accomplishment for a woman in the eyes of the majority of other women. It may be viewed differently, by-and-by, when we have progressed a little more.

What, then, is the best highway for experience that a woman may follow without rendering herself obnoxious to her fellow-creatures? Really, it is a hard question to answer: and especially for a man who likes simplicity of all things best in the other sex. It is very certain that I and many of my fellow-men are vastly repelled by the cold, calculating eye of an erudite woman—whether her erudition be of books or of the world. Contrast her with the youngest daughter of the Rector of Out-of-the-Way, who, poor girl, denied a governess because her father's stipend is small compared to the number and needs of his offspring, finds daily occupation in the dairy, and among the sick and poor of the parish; and I fear—though the Rector's daughter's beauty may be of no very classical order—she will carry the palm for attractiveness.

A man in the flush of his faculties loves experience as a bird loves to wing through the air. But even a good woman, who has seen much of life and its secret strings, and has kept unsullied through all her experiences, is at the end less disposed to congratulate and plume herself, than to shake her head and sigh. To a man, disillusionment, though something undesirable, is better far than a lifetime of ignorance. But a woman grieves over shattered ideals, bursted hopes, and the grossness, viewed closely, of what at a distance she had conceived to be divine in purity and charm.

In fact, for the present, at any rate, as in past times, there is nothing for it but to repeat that woman's happiest experience is won through the affections and not with the understanding. With her

Love will still be lord of all.

Hence the shy little daughter of the Rector, who carries her fair, blushing face from pauper to pauper, and wins love wherever she goes, has better experience than the woman to whom three continents are familiar, and whose "savoir faire" is never at fault. Man's strongest experience is gained by the head; woman's sweetest experience by her heart. And strength is

to a man what sweetness or beauty is to woman.

If we regard experience in its ordinary signification as a series of tryings or attempts, I suppose it is a word which our American cousins may claim to know more about than we ourselves. Failure means less to the average American, much less, than it means to one of us. It is his ladder, indeed, by which he mounts afresh, though in other direction. His experience may not be of a very extensive kind. He may know hardly anything about courts and the classics, about pictures and archaeology; but he has gained what is better far—some very useful and even profound self-knowledge. And it is certainly as material for him that he should know that he is quite unable to make a fortune as a candy-seller, though events have proved that as a lawyer he might do well, as it is that he should be able to distinguish a Carlo Dolci from a Guercino.

It is, in fact, their experience that gives the Americans their chief individuality as a people of the world's nations. They stand towards us Europeans like an octopus towards a common fish. "We can do eight things," they might say to us, "where you can do but one—and that one with difficulty!" They have, therefore, eight chances of success where we have but one.

This success, indeed, though not the infallible mark of a man of experience, is one of the rewards of experience. To some of us, there is nothing more indicative of greatness than success. Greatness, therefore, is, in so far, but another name for profound experience.

"One of the greatest of a great man's qualities," says Esmond, in Thackeray's novel, "is success. 'Tis the result of all the others; 'tis a latent power in him, which compels the favour of the gods, and subjugates fortune."

But, on the other hand, we must not forget those—and they are not a few—to whom experience is like dust in the eyes. It does but increase their difficulty of going, instead of making life more plain. They are perplexed by the extension of their knowledge, rather than aided by the loss of their ignorance. They are like men in a desert, who fancy that the farther they go in search of a road they have lost, the wider becomes the horizon of their despair.

Of such men, Leopardi, perhaps too

bitterly for them, and with over-little regard for more successful men of the world, indites the dolorous epitaph. They are the "people who seem doomed to succeed with their fellows in no single thing—and this neither from their inexperience, nor their ignorance of social life; but from a fixed law of their being. They are unable to lay aside a certain simplicity of manners, and to resume those artificial and mendacious tricks of conduct which all other men, and even fools, use unconsciously, and which become, as it were, a part of their nature, etc."

Here, of course, Leopardi treats of the geniuses of the race. One is disposed to think that he exaggerates the evil of their plight. Though their experience does not help them much in their intercourse with other men, it opens their eyes to their own value. And let the philosophers of melancholy say what they please, the genius does not fail to enjoy, very rapturously at times, the realisation of his own intellectual kingship among men. If this is not compensation for his inability to talk of the weather as glibly as his greengrocer, or to smile upon the stranger with the methodical sweetness of an evangelist, commonplaces have a higher worth than they are supposed to have, and genius is really the undesirable excellence that the pessimists say it is.

As for the discomforts which such a man may feel from friction with his lowlier brethren, for these he has, it must be confessed, generally to thank himself. He should have disciplined his delicacy of spirit even as he has regulated his intellectual exercises. A sensitive person must, in short, habituate himself to explaining away the slights—or what he conceives to be slights—that he is sure to encounter abroad in the world. And really, the intellect is so pliable and sophisticated that he will, with practice, find this no such hard task. Thus, eventually, it will come to pass that the severest insults—vexatious enough to the hardened—will glance off his seasoned skin without causing him even the ghost of a pang.

Obviously, however, if our friend trusts to the chapter of accidents in this particular, instead of to systematic training, he must take the consequences, like people of ordinary clay. It is, after all, something to be the possessor, like Lord Chatham, of a certain "superiority of mind," even though, as with him, by preventing "the usual habits of intercourse with the world,"

it gives "an air of austerity to his manners," and precludes "the policy of a convenient condescension to the minutiae of politeness and fascinating powers of address." This is what one of his biographers, somewhat heavily, says of the Earl of Chatham, a man who, spite of the gout and his "superiority," did good work for his country, and found life worth living.

Further, it is, methinks, an error, though a natural one, to assume that those who retreat before experience, like a thrashed boy from the cane, are in so compassionate a state as they would sometimes have us believe. What if their eyes are opened to divers discomfiting problems that they saw nothing of before? It may suit their convenience to cry over the vexation they suffer in being unable to crack these several nuts. But all the while—perchance so deeply in them that no shadow of it shows in their clouded faces—there is a sparkle of ironical joy in their hearts over what they term the sorry mysteries of life. It may be rather grim revelling; but it suits their temperament, and braces their system quite as effectually as the bellow of laughter with which an old fox-hunting squire acknowledges a comrade's good story.

There's not a doubt that false scent lies thick about the world's surface. Many a man, for lack of courage, enterprise, or strength, goes all his life after it. The Yankee, on the other hand, is not content to do this. He no sooner finds that he is caught by it, than he stops and makes another cast. He gains experience. The other, who plods on like a sheep, may, with groans, gain a living; but nothing more. And it is the same in other matters. The man who realises, or thinks he realises, that he has hitherto believed in this or that, with quite culpable blindness, no sooner turns his back on the venerable fiction—whatever it be—than he perceives new possibilities before him. He may have fallen much in the rear of those who are after the fox; but what's to hinder him riding whither he lists? And so he snuffs the air with a fresh and inspiring sense of freedom. The others may go tailing after each other if they please. He, for his part, will follow his humour.

When all's said, the discreet Bishop Blougram may furnish us with the key, as well as the lock to the gate of experience:

The common problem, yours, mine, everyone's,  
Is—not to fancy what were fair in life,  
Provided it could be, but, finding first  
What may be, then find how to make it fair  
Up to our means . . .



## THE BRIDGE HOUSE.

A SERIAL STORY.

By B. DEMPSTER.

*Author of "Two and One," "Through Gates of Gold,"  
"Mrs. Silas B. Bunthorpe," etc., etc.*

## CHAPTER XI.

THOUGH April had come, the weather had not mended much. It had been a long, wet winter, and the spring bid fair to be the same. It had been raining nearly all day, and the wind was rising. Daisy, about six o'clock, stood at the dining-room window, looking out into the grey, wet evening. She was so absorbed in her thoughts, that she did not hear Aston come in from the garden.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked, as he came softly up to her. She started, afraid as she always was now, when she found herself alone with him.

"I hardly know," trying to laugh, "except that there is too much rain for April—and that there is too much trouble in some lives."

He knew then of what she had been thinking.

"Poor fellow," he said, kindly, though his heart was full of rage. "I wonder if I could help him in any way. I'm afraid you thought me very hard on him this morning; but—well, you know, I never quite approved of his letting that cousin of his do as he liked with his property. But if I can be of any service to him now, I shall be glad."

His kindness disarmed her.

"Oh! if you would," she exclaimed, her lips quivering. "I can't do anything. I'm certain he won't touch any of my money, though we are just like brother and sister. If you could help him—There is nothing I would not do to show you my gratitude!"

A sudden, desperate thought seized him. He caught her hands.

"Do you mean that, Daisy?" She tried to draw her hands away; but he only held them tighter. "If you promise to give me what I ask for, I swear that he shan't be a beggar, or, what he dreads most—dishonoured. Men will say it is his fault. They won't make allowances as you do. He knew that his cousin was speculating, and did not interfere. Men will call his conduct by an ugly name, for he had been growing richer by it. But I will pull him through. I can. I will do it, if you ask me. Only promise to be my wife."

"Mr. Aston! Let me go! I can't——"

"You must, darling! I love you so! Do you remember the promise you gave me on the night of the ball? You can fulfil it now. It is the only way you can help my life. Be good to me and Anthony Melvin at the same time. No! I won't make conditions. I'll help him, anyway. But don't be cruel to me. I want you so badly. I love you so dearly!"

His words fell about her like a shower of fiery hail, confusing, stunning her. A thought of Anthony, and how she might help him, mixed itself up with a consciousness of Aston's great kindness to herself. He needed her. He was not happy. She did like him, though at times she was afraid of him. Bewildered, scarcely yet understanding, full of pity for him, troubled for Anthony, she looked up at him appealingly.

Did he misunderstand her expression, or did he wilfully take advantage of her confusion? Before she could speak, his arms were about her, his lips had touched hers. With an inarticulate cry, she tried to free herself.

But he had conquered. He held her too fast. A sense of his overmastering will, a vague thought that she was helping both him and Anthony, a helpless consciousness of that kiss which was still dyeing her face and throat with its scarlet stain, overwhelmed her, and she struggled against him no more.

Miss Ross's amazement was extreme. Aston announced his engagement to her before dinner. She had her own doubts on the wisdom of the matter; but, like a wise woman, held her peace. She congratulated them both with charming impartiality, genuinely interested and excited in the event, and quite longed to see the effect of the news on Riverbridge next day.

It was still raining when Wilton, the same evening, arrived at Aston's office. He was punctual. The clock was striking eight as he reached the mills. He saw no one about, but a light was burning in the office-window, and he found the door unlocked.

The room was empty. Aston had not yet arrived. It was lighted by a reading-lamp that stood on the desk. Near the desk was a small table and a comfortable chair. The green shade of the lamp threw down its light full on the desk and table. It seemed as if Aston had been in and only just left. A half-written note

lay on the desk. The room was full of the scent of a cigar, the ashes and end of which were in a tray on the table. The room looked comfortable enough. Wilton was wet to the skin. He was faint for want of food. He had had his own reasons for not being seen in Riverbridge, where he was only too well known at all the inns in the town. So he had determined to wait for food till he returned to town.

He had been wandering about in the rain, getting shelter where he could, and was feeling exhausted, weak as he still was from his illness. It would be a comfort to have rest and shelter for a few moments. Yet when he entered the office, and closed the door behind him, he started violently, and made a half-turn to go out again. Besides the odour of the cigar, the atmosphere of the room was heavy with another. A glass lay broken on the floor by the table; its contents were spilled, filling the room with their fumes. It was brandy. Wilton glanced at the table. Just over it hung a small cupboard; the door was half open, and inside was a brandy bottle. As Wilton caught sight of it, he shuddered violently, and, turning, opened the door. The rain was coming down in torrents. Chilled, faint for want of food, exhausted with fatigue, Wilton hesitated.

"I'm stronger," he muttered. "And it's not fit for a dog out there. He can't be long now."

He sat down again, just within the door, leaving it open, that the fresh air might come in and take the place of those deadly fumes. But the wind and the rain drove into the room, and after some minutes Wilton rose and shut the door, with an impatient curse on Aston for delaying so long.

Ugh! How cold he was! And then the next moment he seemed consumed with a raging fire, which scorched the blood in his veins, and parched up his throat and lips. That rain! How it fell! And the gurgling noises of the river. It made a man feel thirsty. A drink of water would set him right. Perhaps there was some in the room. There, in the cupboard—was not that a decanter? He made a few steps towards it, then stopped, shuddering violently.

"It's not water I want! I'm a miserable cur! I'm a dolt!" He set his teeth hard, and something like the fierce glare of a wild beast's eyes leaped into his. "It's all his fault. What is he stopping for?

I won't drink; I swore to Melvin. Half-past eight, and he's not here yet. I can't hold out much longer. I'm trembling for food, and chilled to the bone." He drew in a deep breath. The air was heavy with brandy. "Rare good stuff! None of that fiery, villainous concoction that sends a man mad—real old cognac, that goes into a man's veins, and gives strength to his feeble limbs. Just a mouthful would make me warm. Why, in the weak, hungry condition I am in, he might argue me into doing anything; and then where would Melvin be? But I promised—Only a mouthful—What on earth makes him so long coming?—I'm strong, too, now. I can take a drink, and stop—What a hundred shames to waste such rare stuff—a whole tumblerful—Aston will be here in a moment—"

Nearer, nearer. With glistening, glaring eyes; with that awful thirst and longing parching his throat; with his poor, weak heart playing with temptation. Nearer, nearer. His hand was on the cupboard now. How faint, and cold, and miserable he was! He could hardly stand, he was trembling so. How delicious the air in the room was! It made him think of what the taste would be—There was no hand outstretched to draw him back; no one to see—

Yes. A white face peered through the rain-swept panes from the dark night. A face which had been watching there for nearly an hour. A malignant triumph smiled into it as it pressed more eagerly forward to look into the room.

That miserable, tempted man at the cupboard! How could he resist any longer? The very air he breathed was full of the poison that was killing his body and soul.

Ah! It was done.

The clock struck nine. It struck again, half-past. And still the man outside watched—the exultant light of a murderer in his eyes.

Inside—Was the brandy all finished already? He must have more, more! Wilton staggered to the door, dragging it open, and stumbling out into the raining night. There was no cold or wet for him now; no darkness. What was that? The rushing and roaring of waters, or mocking, merry voices calling to him? He would go and join them. There was plenty to drink there—

He stumbled on, passing the dark figure that stood by the window, and shrank close against the wall as he hurried by. Where were the voices? To the left. He wheeled round, skirting the wall. He could hear quite distinctly now what they were saying.

How the river was rushing past the mills to-night! How deep and swift and black the waters were! A man who fell into them would not easily—

The tall figure, hiding under the shadow of the wall, crept after the blind, stumbling man, catching glimpses of him through the night and blinding rain. He must be close to the bank now. Ha! what was that? A stifled scream—a heavy plunge—

"You have murdered him!"

Aston turned sharply, white and trembling in every limb. Jane stood beside him, in the rain and the gloom.

"I have been watching you, as you watched him. I know what you did. And now he is dead, and you know it, and meant it to be. And now you shall never marry that baby-faced girl; for I will always stand between!"

#### CHAPTER XII.

THE next day, Anthony came down to Riverbridge to say good-bye. He was late in arriving. The floods were out, and traffic was delayed. Daisy was not in when he arrived. She was out driving with Aston.

Miss Ross soon acquainted him with the news of the engagement. He received it in silence; and a vague suspicion that Miss Ross had had in her mind was set at rest by his quietness. It was eight o'clock when the wheels of the dog-cart were at last heard, and Miss Ross, who had been growing quite anxious, thinking of the floods, hurried, followed by Anthony, to meet Aston and Daisy.

Daisy seemed very tired, and there was something so eager and clinging in the hand-clasp she gave Anthony, that that young man was touched, and seemed to forget to shake hands with Aston.

Aston nodded to him, not apparently noticing the omission. He replied rather shortly to Miss Ross's enquiries, that they had been delayed at one of the houses they had visited, and that the floods had necessitated a longer round home.

Anthony was shocked, when they moved into a brighter light, to see how pale and

thin Daisy's face had grown. But she seemed in good spirits, and talked brilliantly through the dinner. On the contrary, Aston was grave and taciturn. Before the end of it he was called away. The river was rising so rapidly, they were afraid for the mill-dam.

The moment Aston left the room Daisy's manner changed—all her brightness vanished.

"I want to go and see the river rushing under the bridge," she said, when they rose from table. "It is not raining now," hastily, as she saw Miss Ross prepare to object, "and Anthony will take care of me."

When Daisy stated an intention in that tone, Miss Ross had learned by experience that it was useless to object.

"You aren't going out without any wrap!" exclaimed Anthony in the hall, as he saw her twist a piece of black lace round her head.

"I'm all right!" she said, with unusual petulance. "I want to get out. I feel suffocated in the house; besides, my dress is thick. I hadn't time to change it for dinner."

Without a word, he took down his own light overcoat and put it round her. She laughed, nestling her chin down into the big collar, which he proceeded to turn up round her neck until her pretty face was almost buried in it.

"It's rather large," he said, with such supreme gravity, that she laughed again; "and the sleeves don't fit very well," wondering how it would feel the next time he put on the coat himself.

"They fit too much," she said, "like the Irishman's coat," and then her face changed and paled. "Do let us get out," she whispered, hurriedly.

Anthony, glancing up the staircase, saw Jane coming down. He opened the door, and they went out into the street.

The wind was so high that Daisy could hardly stand against it. But she clung to his arm, and they went on to the bridge, where a good many people were assembled. She leaned over the low parapet, and looked down into the roaring, foam-flecked water below. Lights gleamed from some of the windows of the mills, where they stood on the corner of the swollen, turbid stream. One or two persons who recognised her came up to speak to her; and, after a few moments, she made Anthony take her away.

"Let us go round by the side-door," she said. "I want to tell you something."

"I know," he said.

"Has he told you already? He might have left it to me!"

"It was Miss Ross," he replied. "I was waiting for an opportunity to congratulate you."

They did not speak again till they reached the side-door. It was approached by a narrow, flagged street, running down by the other side of the house, and by which all traffic passed down to the mills. Down here they were comparatively sheltered from the wind. A small doorway, between the line of outhouses and the house itself, opened into the garden. Over the doorway was a small sign-board, on which was written:

BREND ASTON.

Licensed Maltster.

A lamp flickering in the wind cast fitful lights upon the name.

She looked up to it, and her eyes grew hard and bright.

"He would not let me hurry home this afternoon, though he saw how much I wanted to come. I believe it was only because you were coming. I wonder why he is so strange to you?" Her eyes were full of resentment and something like humiliation. "Perhaps I have been spoiled, and don't like not to be allowed to have my own way. You and every one have spoiled me, and it did come hard to have to beg him to let me come home, and then——" Her face crimsoned with humbled pride. "I didn't want you to come and find me out, as if I didn't care——"

"Your letter told me you cared," he said, smiling, but his face looked pale in the flickering light of the lamp overhead.

"Oh, I did care." She laid her hand on his arm. "And that is why I wanted—— But he would not come home till I had promised to marry him." Her voice dropped a little. "Next week. He does not want me to tell any one; but I said I should tell you."

The young man looked at her very strangely.

"Daisy," he exclaimed, in a curious, low tone, almost as if he were afraid. "You don't love this man——"

She met his eyes.

And now the light overhead, flickering and casting weird, dancing shadows, fell on two very white, young faces.

She did not speak. She scarcely breathed.

"You do not love him," he said again.

And then, as he read her eyes, her pale, still mouth, a great wave of understanding—of himself, of her—rushed over him, setting every pulse throbbing.

"And I love you." A low, and exceedingly bitter cry broke from him. "And I never understood till now. What am I to do without you? Daisy! If I had known only a little sooner—would you have been my wife?"

But the awakening had been too violent, too sudden. A little trembling movement shook her from head to foot, and she drew back into the doorway, as if to fly from him. The door creaked, as if the sudden gust of wind blowing round the corner of the street had shaken it. Neither noticed the slight sound. Daisy leant her hand heavily against the door.

"I understand it all now," he went on, and the strong young mouth trembled. "It has been love ever since I played with you as a boy, and now it is too late. For even if you were free, I could not ask you now, ruined as I am!" Still she did not speak. Then he forgot himself and remembered only her. "But you, Daisy, don't marry him. You do not love him. He has forced you into the marriage. He is not a good man. There is something in his past life that will darken yours. Break it off while you can! Don't misunderstand me!"

"I don't misunderstand you," she spoke at last. "I can't give him up now. I have promised—and I seem so necessary to him," she said, slowly. "He said this afternoon that if I gave him up, he would kill himself——"

"The coward!" muttered Anthony under his breath.

"He was half mad, I think," she went on, as if not hearing. "He was so afraid I did not mean to marry him after all. Besides——"

She stopped. If she let Anthony even suspect that his welfare had anything to do with the marriage, he would go straight to Aston and defy him, and refuse to take any help.

"Anthony, go away now. I shall marry him. I think you had better not try to see me—or hear of me. Some day——"

Some day! Her voice broke. But she motioned him back from her.

"Anthony, help me!"

And he said not another word.





